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Advocacy and Human Rights Education

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Being able to fill the gap in terms of the respect and the protection of HR

Our work is extremely demanding: we all contribute, locally, continentally.

But how to do this work better is our question of the day.

First, brief review of the concepts of human rights education (HRE), and advocacy.

What is their scope and what is their content?

Looking at the interdependence of advocacy and education.

HRE: generally defined as a process designed to transmit knowledge, promote attitudes, values through information and awareness in the area of HR. More and more part of a socialization process, not just individuals. Involves specific education techniques.

Advocacy: planned process of action designed to have a positive impact

Can be defined as a dynamic process of action designed to influence and lead to the enforcement and respect of HR

Look closely at these 2 definitions, notice interdependent links.

The two supplement each other at 5 different levels:

- 1- Both start from an observation, both aim at changing behavior
- 2- They are both founded on interpersonal relationships
- 3- Both transcend the individual, they look at the community and society
- 4- Level of content – both based on a situation of concern
- 5- Both are founded on a participative approach, on dialogue with target population

Both are mutually supportive and encourage positive change.

Advocacy must be used appropriately by NGOs. 2 major features:

- 1- Goals and founding principles
- 2- Leads to the establishment of more just societies

Any advocacy campaign requires an understanding of goals and techniques.

Must be part of a flexible, dynamic process, which must itself be adapted to target groups. Advocacy is not a sprint but a long distance race.

6 factors ensure that advocacy is effective over time:

- 1- Analysis of the situation: political, economic, socio cultural context. Document research, statistical research, studies, polls, data etc allow us to produce an overview of the situation, in order to carefully identify the problem, situate strengths and weaknesses etc
- 2- Identification of the problems that you are responding to: must be an extensive problem
- 3- Clarity of the objective; relevant and realistic goal; adapted to the context

4-Rational management of key players; target population; 2 targets, primary target and secondary target;

Primary target: all those who can directly change the situation

Secondary target: those who can indirectly influence the situation

Third target: the beneficiaries

5- Presentation of advocacy message, goal of which is to incite action; clear and concise; also think of message content, and means – media, radio

6- Follow up- assessment of operations

Conclusion: methods should appeal to us as militants; relentlessly advocating for HR, so that HR, peace, freedom, justice may be respected everywhere in the world.

Chrysongone encourages participants to be committed to effective advocacy work

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One day a devoted Talmudic student ran out of the synagogue shouting, “What is the meaning of life? What is the meaning of life?” He ran through the streets shouting. He came to the house of his Rabbi. He went inside and, almost in tears, pleaded, “What is the meaning of life, master?” The rabbi slapped the student across the face. “Why did you hit me,” asked the startled student. The rabbi answered: “Such a good question. And you want to exchange it for an answer? It is the answers that keep us apart. It is the questions that unite us!”

And so, I share with you what I hope are some of those questions that bring us together, two of which include:

1. Is it possible to have human rights education without advocacy?
- and
2. Is it possible to have advocacy without education?

And, though it will sound like I have answers, I urge you to accept what I have to say as entirely provisional, each apparent conclusion containing many implicit question marks and all of it open to debate – just as I strive always to be open to dialogue and persuasion.

So, first of all I would like to suggest that education and advocacy are inseparable. Or, at least, they ought to be. Because, as many of you know who have applied for grants to do education work, you often have to be careful to show that you are not doing advocacy work. In Canada, for instance, there are strict regulations governing charitable work which can include education but which all but excludes advocacy; what it does, actually, is to contain and regulate advocacy. And, as we look at the various ways in which different cultures, countries and institutions have distinguished advocacy from education, we can see the contours of the history of the incredibly unequal distribution of power and resources around the world.

For what is human rights education all about if it isn't about trying to bring into existence what we believe to be a better world – one with more peace, justice, kindness, compassion, sharing and more, of course? And this means nothing less than taking on all the very old and tragic histories of the unjust uses of power: racism, patriarchy, colonialism, homophobia, genocide and more. So, let me pose one of those “uniting” questions: Isn't all human rights work (including human rights education) about power? Confronting power? Challenging unjust uses of power? Enabling people to name the history of power of which they are a part and, having named it, change it?

Paulo Freire, Brazilian educator and philosopher, made clear that there is no such thing as a neutral educational process. All education serves specific interests; interests that have histories that we can explore, recover, tell differently. There is a common sense about education that has been exported around the world by the handful of colonizing nations that would have us believe that education precedes action: first we learn our ABC's and then *and only then* can we dare to go out and try and make sense of the world. But Freire, as well as many other educators, scholars and activists have affirmed the notion that education is intimately linked with the daily creation of the worlds in which we live.

This human rights training which you are participating in right now, is based on these radical notions. The deceptively simple spiral model which is a core part of the IH RTP curriculum contains tremendous transformative potential. It challenges dominant notions of education that treat learners as empty slates and radically respects the experience that all learners bring to a learning situation. Nor does this mean taking that experience at face value. Much of our “experience” deserves to be challenged. And the means for this is dialogue in which we can compare, analyze and research our experience and, having done so, perhaps alter our interpretations of our experience and thus create new knowledge, new understandings, new worlds. Monologue, by contrast, is the unilateral communication that characterizes much education around the world. Popular education, which I have been practicing for over 25 years, is one form of education that is based on dialogue. But we have a long way to go to see this kind of education as the norm.

Author Doris Lessing, writing about education, put it rather starkly in these terms:

It may be that there is no other way of educating people. Possibly, but I don't believe it. In the meantime it would be a help at least to describe things properly, to call things by their right names. Ideally, what should be said to every child, repeatedly, throughout his or her school life is something like this:

"You are in the process of being indoctrinated. We have not yet evolved a system of education that is not a system of indoctrination. We are sorry, but it is the best we can do. What you are being taught here is an amalgam of current prejudice and the choices of this particular culture. The slightest look at history will show how impermanent these must be. You are being taught by people who have been able to accommodate themselves to a regime of thought laid down by their predecessors. It is a self-perpetuating system. Those of you who are more robust and individual than others, will be encouraged to leave and find ways of educating yourself - educating your own judgement. Those that stay must

remember, always and all the time, that they are being moulded and patterned to fit into the narrow and particular needs of this particular society."

One of my greatest teachers and a dear friend put it more succinctly: "be passionately aware that you could be completely wrong."

This is a harsh truth and, stated as extremely as it is, perhaps, does not go down easily. But I think it gives appropriate weight to the power of education both to limit minds as well as to create the transformative potential with which we can remake our worlds for the better.

When it comes to the question of the connections between education and advocacy, we are up against some very powerful common sense notions. Not the least of which is that these two practices are different. I propose that they are only as different as the warp and weft of a carpet. Some of you may be weavers and know far more than I about my choice of metaphor (and, of you, I beg indulgence). The warp is the lengthwise fibers across which is drawn the weft, creating the marvellous patterns (from elegantly simple to startlingly complex) that we see in carpets, rugs, tapestries the world over.

My perspective is limited – that's only human. But in my ignorance I know that the ways in which we (meaning all of us here from so many countries and cultures and histories) *weave* education and advocacy makes for a wondrous assemblage of tapestries. You have been sharing this for over two weeks together. And what treasures there are to be found in these patterns.

Once there was a Sufi who was captured by the police and accused of theft. Despite his protests of innocence he was convicted and sentenced to three years in jail. He had a loving wife who visited him every day. One day she was allowed to bring him a carpet on which he could pray. Three times a day he would unroll the carpet and, kneeling and bowing down, would pray. Weeks and months passed in this manner. One day the intricate pattern of the carpet's weaving caught his notice. There was something unusual about it. Still, day after day, he prayed and gradually the intricate detail of the carpet began to make sense to him. As the days passed and he continued to pray the pattern resolved until one day it was clear to him. The pattern in the weaving was the design of the lock on his prison door. Using his new knowledge he picked the lock and escaped.

There is, of course, no once-and-for-all answer as to how education and advocacy connect. Though connect they do in public and private ways. I believe it is the obligation of the human rights worker and educator always to keep alive this question. We are each of us like the Sufi in his cell, ever staring into the changing warp and weft before our eyes. What seems the norm today, what seems the common sense of our time, may one day look very different to us. It is hard to look ahead to what does not yet exist. So let's look back for a moment. And for this I would like to use the example of Article 17 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states:

(1) Everyone has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others.

and

(2) No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property.

For many people, this statement is common sense. “Property” after all, exists in abundance (or, is it scarcity) and, in the spirit of equal rights, it makes sense that all should have the rights stated in Article 17. But this statement, as I’m sure many of you are aware, is a loaded one. It takes as a given at least two very powerful notions: that there *is* such a thing as “property” and that it is possible to “own” something. These are ideas that have been so successfully naturalized that for many people it is nonsense even to question them. But these ideas do have histories that we can trace over many thousands of years and hundreds (if not thousands) of cultures.

Lacking time to do this now, I would underline my point by asking you to consider what you may know of indigenous cultures’ notions of relations to the earth. For many indigenous cultures (many, of course, gone forever; many dying; and many continuing to exist despite ongoing oppression) the earth and all that is in it is not property that can be owned but rather abundant relationships in which *participate* all the creatures and living things of the earth (including humans) as well as the winds and stars and changing of the seasons. I do not want to romanticize aboriginal peoples but rather use this example to point out that the notion of property and ownership is not common sense for everyone. And we find this idea in many places and times. An old Jewish folktale comes to mind:

Once two neighbours fell to arguing over which owned a particular piece of land. Their argument threatened to grow into a bitter quarrel as each was convinced that he owned the land over which they fought. Another neighbour suggested that they go and ask their rabbi for advice. This they did and each man presented to the rabbi his case and his proof for ownership of the land. The rabbi listened to each man and said, “you both have good cases, good proof and you are both correct. I cannot decide. Let us go to the land you are arguing over.” Once they arrived on the disputed land the rabbi got down on his hands and knees and put his ear to the ground. He stayed in this position for some time and then he stood up. “Gentlemen, I have listened to the land. And the land says that it belongs to neither of you. Rather it says that you belong to the land.”

Last night, some of you listened to Kenneth Deer talk of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the disappointing about-face that Canada made. And, while there are, no doubt, many items of dispute within the Declaration, I know that Article 30 makes those countries subject to land claims very, very nervous. Article 30 states:

Indigenous peoples have the right to determine and develop priorities and strategies for the development or use of their lands, territories and other resources, including the right to require that States obtain their free and informed consent

prior to the approval of any project affecting their lands, territories and other resources, particularly in connection with the development, utilization or exploitation of mineral, water or other resources. Pursuant to agreements with the indigenous peoples concerned, just and fair compensation shall be provided for any such activities and measures taken to mitigate adverse environmental, economic, social, cultural or spiritual impact;

There are yet more common sense notions in this language that are worth examining. But it is not hard to see that Article 30 makes a strong challenge to rights of so-called property. And, therefore, hardly surprising that nations such as Canada, the United States and Australia, with their dismal history of oppression of indigenous people, would resist the acceptance of such a declaration.

What puzzled me was how easy it was for Canada to obstruct this Declaration when it was last up for a vote. What was the Canadian popular opinion on this matter? Where was the social movement of native and non-native people and organizations? Why were we not able to hold our politicians to account on this decision and successfully push for Canada to support this declaration a few months ago?

The answer to these questions lie in this dialogue about the relationship of human rights education and advocacy. One cannot exist without the other. Education without advocacy (for a better world, to put it most liberally) is the indoctrination that Lessing speaks of in the quote I shared earlier. And advocacy without education risks being the authoritarian monologue that Freire critiques.

My words thus far have been directed at your minds and, I hope, your hearts as well. So I would like to end with poetry, which I believe to be the language of the soul. Otto René Castillo was a Guatemalan poet, who was both advocate and educator for the rights of Guatemalans against the oppressive dictatorship of the 1960s. He was captured by the military and murdered in 1967.

Before The Balance, Tomorrow

When the enthusiasm
of our time
is recounted
for those
yet to be born,
but who announce themselves
with a kinder face,
we will come out winners,
we who have suffered most.

To be ahead
of one's time
is to suffer much.

But it is beautiful to love the world
with the eyes
of those
still
to be born.

And splendid
to know oneself already victorious
when everything around
is still so cold, so dark.

Dialogue between Chrysogone and Chris

Chrysogone asks Chris what exactly popular education is and what are the forms that it can take.

Chris responds that he uses the term popular education in two ways. The first, as a historically rooted process that can be traced, which he learned from Latin American countries. The second, as a way of naming many different practices and pedagogies of education – queer education, peace education, aboriginal education etc.

Paulo Freire in Brazil saw that the education system was teaching people helplessness, that it constituted a system of exclusion for a majority of the Brazilian population, and his response was to reinvent education.

While Chris agrees with Chrysogone about the importance of education, he claims that we cannot afford to be naïve about the histories of education.

Chris asks Chrysogone what exactly he means by democracy, as democracy is a concept that that has become naturalized but is not necessarily positive (US is pushing a particular form of democracy on other countries around the world)

Chrysogone responds that democracy has many dimensions.

Education has a very important place within democracy.

Democracy must also be based on HR development, educational development; particularly in Africa.

There is also an important link between advocacy and democracy.

African countries have inherited from the French colonialist system, in terms of legislation, schools etc, which is not always in phase with national realities.

Question and answer period

In response to the question on whether it is possible to accrue advocacy in a communist country, Chrysogone states that communist countries are not necessarily different from other countries. There are always way to increase advocacy, though it is difficult when country represses NGO activities.

In every country there are social forces that can modify the course of things.

Importance of choosing the form that is most appropriate for advocacy work.

Chris adds that, in theory, communism does not exclude democratic practice, though historically it has been extremely authoritarian.

Perhaps we need to shift away from a focus on systems of government as democratic and communist, and see if they are authoritarian or participatory; because many so-called democratic governments are in fact very authoritarian.

Participatory education is new for many of us - we have to get used to it, learn to participate in education.

The same applies to governments - people need to learn to live with new forms of governments.

Importance of starting at the grassroots with popular education – desire can create an environment that can ultimately bring into existence new forms of governments

What is the difference between lobbying and advocacy?

Chrysogone answers that we have to remember that the constituent elements are the same. Lobbying, however, is associated to interest or pressure groups. In the US for example lobbying has become almost an institution – professional lobbyists.

In general, lobbying deals more with private interests, and advocacy deals more with public interest, but in the case of the US lobbying is extensive.

On a question on hidden curriculums, Chris responds that any form of education needs to work on being transparent, that even popular education can have a hidden curriculum. One of the most important principles is to be straightforward.

With respect to a question on effective advocacy work, Chris responds that there exists a difference between a change in behavior and a change in personal convictions. Personal convictions are not enough - there is a lot of behavior that needs to change, i.e. violence against women.

But personal convictions need to change as well, relationships with others; we need to bring personal convictions into our HR work

Human rights education work is also about becoming new people, struggling to stay within our communities, retaining a link with our communities, while defending our new convictions and ideas, and refusing to fall back onto the old ones.

Constant struggle, tension in our work, which is emancipatory in the end